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AUTHOR	Page, William R.
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ABSTRACT

To establish a remedial and developmental program for seventh and eighth graders with indications of learning disabilities, groups of children, 1-year or more below grade level in reading and arithmetic skills and recommended by teachers, were enrolled in a special pilot program. Within the 6-hour day were physical education, music, art, industrial arts, homemaking, English, math, social studies, and science in unstructured blocks of time. The techniques employed were children helping each other, making their own worksheets and tests, charting their own progress, tutoring those in lower grades, doing independent projects, and using and devising their own diagnostic tests. The results indicated that the children developed better attitudes and enjoyed school more, improved in social skills, learned to progress by their own efforts, worked harder, and gained more than a full school year's progress. The teachers were able to individualize instruction to a large extent which proved very beneficial. (JM)

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INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

William R. Page, Program Director
Brittany Junior High School
University City Public Schools
8125 Groby Road
University City, Mo. 63130

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Central Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory, Inc.
10646 St. Charles Rock Road
St. Ann, Missouri 63074
314-429-3535

A DESCRIPTION

THE PROBLEM

An urgent need in education is concerned with the disabled learner at the Junior high school level. The disabled learner is one who suffers from any or all of the perceptual disorders, motor disorders, language disorders, or disorders of concept formation and reasoning which interfere with learning. This child, sometimes estimated to comprise as much as 20% of any school population, is frequently described as having minimal brain dysfunction. He is one who is seemingly bright enough but fails to learn. He is frequently given social promotions and is variously described by teachers as a daydreamer, an underachiever, a slow learner, an emotional problem or "just plain lazy".

By the time a disabled learner gets to junior high school he has normally encountered up to 7 years of frustration in virtually every phase of his educational experience. His lack of success is cumulative and unless something specifically is done to reverse this condition there can be no real hope for any future success. Such a learner requires many special remedial and developmental techniques, materials, groupings, and considerations, if he is to profit from junior high experiences and be saved from the drop-out rolls.

THE APPROACH

Due to the complexity of the problem of providing for adolescents, we must necessarily attempt a total program dealing with all aspects of their needs; thus, we cannot be concerned solely with the remediation aspect but must attempt to make significant changes in the total learning environment, to wit:

1. Removing him from the regular classroom competition, demands, and frustrations.
2. Providing a basis for success in school learning.

3. Remediating perceptual and language deficits.

THE PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this project is to establish a comprehensive remedial and developmental program which would enable 7th and 8th graders with manifestations of learning disabilities, frequently characterized as minimal brain dysfunction syndrome, to profit more fully from their junior high learning experiences.

THE OBJECTIVES

Having removed him from the regular classroom situation, the program is structured for the following general objectives:

1. Strengthening self-concept and self-image.
2. Individual "prescriptive" programs with completely individualized teaching.
3. Shifting responsibility for learning to the child so that the teacher serves as a resource person rather than a task master.
4. Raising academic skills to the appropriate age level by using appropriate materials and attitudes.
5. Affecting attitudinal changes toward disabled learners in teachers, administrators, pupils, parents, and the public.
6. Training teachers in theory and procedures for working with disabled learners.
7. Remediating perceptual deficits.
8. Determining the implications which teaching the disabled learner has for traditional classroom teaching, and the integration of perceptual activities into "regular instruction".
9. Developing diagnostic devices for dealing with disabled learners and for recognizing potential problems in regular classrooms.
10. Adapting and originating materials at 3 levels:

a. Remedial perceptual materials.

b. Low level activities with high interest levels.

c. Material for regular classrooms for increasing perceptual ability of all pupils.

11. Establishing a perceptual training laboratory facility for self-learning and practical experience.

12. Investigating areas of preventive and diagnostic teaching at earlier school levels.

THE RATIONALE

The distinguishing characteristic of this program is the rationale which guides the actions and considerations of the teachers responsible for the program.

The rationale includes the following beliefs:

1. The faith that given a genuine or meaningful choice to learn or not to learn, succeed or not succeed, be accepted or not be accepted, work or not work - any child will choose the better of these.

2. There are certain skills and knowledge essential to each child for progressing through school - it must be the objective of the teacher to teach 100% of this material to 100% of the children for whom she is responsible to 100% proficiency of that material.

3. The acceptance of the fact that slow learning is no more than coming to a task without the necessary prerequisites to perform that task. Thus the teacher can evaluate the appropriateness of the material rather than the child's ability to understand the material.

4. The constant consideration that telling is not teaching - that the learner must be active in the learning process and that a teacher's job is to get the child to answer questions for himself, not give him answers. A rule might be "never do for a child what he can do for himself".

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Children are removed from standard curriculum to work on goals which they and the teacher jointly determine. The goals most meaningful to the children are working on reading and arithmetic. Because motivation is based on the intrinsic value of the material, grades become inadequate to describe the child's progress, so parent conferences are used in lieu of report cards. Progress is reported in terms of what the child has learned (not how he compares with what he "should" learn or with what other 7th graders are learning).

Having responsibility for their own learning, the children may choose at given times to work or not work. At such times as they choose not to work they are permitted to play quiet games, talk or "do nothing".

COMPLETE INDIVIDUALIZATION

The teacher rarely deals with more than one child at a time. Her goal becomes to establish a tutorial relation with each child.

The basis for the complete individualization lies in the child's understanding of his goals. If he knows what he is to learn, what he needs to know, and can determine for himself when he has learned it, he needs the teacher only as a resource to help him reach his goal. He can also use fellow students or books or parents to reach his goals.

Once the goal is to learn the material - because the material is important to him - the child no longer needs extrinsic motivation to work. He works to learn not to get grades, privileges or approval or to keep from getting punishment.

The way to assure that the goal is meaningful to a child is to let him select it. The teacher's primary function thus becomes to help the child determine a goal worthwhile to him and in conformity with the school's goals.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher changes her role from task master to resource person; from

lecturer to tutor; from controlling activity to setting limits according to the needs and goals of individual children.

The teacher must understand the inconsistant behavior of adolescents; be sensitive to his needs in addition to academic requirements; and, tolerant of diverse activities taking place in a limited area. She must perceive her job as helping a child to set or reach his goal rather than to set goals for him.

The teacher must have a repertoire of techniques to permit total differentiation of assignments and personality considerations.

She must feel secure enough that she is willing to try techniques and material and likewise be willing to fail.

THE CLASS STRUCTURE

Within a six hour school day, two hours are used for Physical Education, Music, Art, Industrial Arts and Homemaking. The remaining four hours normally devoted to English, Math, Social Studies and Science are used in an unstructured block of time (10:30 to 3:00 with 1/2 hour for lunch) wherein the child may work on whichever subject he most needs for any length of time he needs.

The basis for discipline is "you do not 'have' to work but you may not keep another child from working". Thus there is no tolerance whatsoever for horseplay, teasing, noise (other than quiet talking) and abuse of material.

FACILITIES

A self-contained single classroom type of area with sections of the area designated and equipped for certain types of activities. There may be an area of the room designated as: quiet area, game table, reading corner, conversation area, materials and supplies area, etc.

Within the concept that the learner must be active, there must be raw materials and "tools" for making learning devices and a place to work on projects of a "crafts" nature.

Moveable partitions and furniture arrangements permit division of areas. Areas are frequently changed.

MATERIALS

The philosophy is to have one or two copies of as many kinds of learning devices as possible.

Standard Material:

- SRA Kits
- Texts
- Workbooks
- Programs
- Activity Books
- Room Library

Equipment:

- Filmstrip viewers
- Tape recorders
- Record players
- Language masters
- Ditto machine
- Individual storage cabinets
- Variety of furniture

Supplies:

- Ditto masters
- Paper cutter
- Scissors
- Magic markers, pencils, pens
- Ream paper
- Plastic glue
- Crafts-type supplies

Teaching Aids

Globe & Maps

Charts

Abacus

Cuisenaire rods

Flannel boards

Games

Scrabble

Puzzles

Concentration

Anagrams

Spill and Spell

Techniques

1. Children helping each other - working together and in groups
2. Children making their own worksheets and tests
3. Children charting their own progress
4. Children tutoring children in lower grades
5. Children doing independent projects
6. Children using and devising diagnostic tests

TECHNIQUES

Children chart their own progress and learn to do self-diagnosis and task analysis. For a child to be responsible for his own learning he must know a.) what he is to learn (goal) b.) what he already knows and doesn't know (self-diagnosis) and c.) be able to identify components necessary for the task (task analysis).

Children make their own worksheets and tests. A child can frequently learn more through determining what material should be on a worksheet than they can by actually "working" the work sheet. He can prepare materials more

appropriate to his level, interests and needs while gaining self-confidence and practicing self-diagnosis.

Children work together according to their own choice and help one another. Once the child accepts the philosophy that the purpose of school is to learn -- not to impress the teacher, nor get a grade, nor get approval nor avoid punishment, he will seek help from whatever source is most efficient and convenient. Many children prefer to ask another child for help. If the teacher has taught one child a concept, one of the best ways of reinforcing that teaching is to refer other students to that child so he can teach it. The responsibility of playing the teacher role plus the self-concept involved in being "teacher" is an especially worthwhile activity. Children may serve as "worksheet checkers", "test givers", "file keepers", "note makers", "activity explainers".

Children become tutors for lower grade level children. The tutoring program was begun as a way to get children to work at lower levels -- to get them to do 1st and 2nd grade work "because you are going to teach it" not "because they need 1st and 2nd grade work". As the program developed other values were found. The following are some observations made by teachers involved in the tutoring program.

1. The tutoring experience builds the self-concept of the tutor.
2. The tutoring assignment can be used to develop academic proficiency in the tutor since assignment can be given in the area where the tutor needs development. Because the tutoring carries assignment prestige, students are willing to learn many skills otherwise labeled as "baby stuff".
3. The tutoring experience creates a need for learning social skills and provides an opportunity for learning responsibility.
4. The tutoring experience causes the tutor to analyze the learning process and to apply what he sees to his own learning style.

5. The tutoring program demands role reversal and thus facilitates attitude changes toward school.

Children doing independent projects. Through individualization it is possible to give children completely engrossing elaborate projects, that necessitates the use of most of the skills we normally attempt to teach.

SELECTION OF CHILDREN

Children are selected on the basis of being a year or more below grade level on the reading and arithmetic parts of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and being recommended by the 6th grade teacher as one not capable of functioning in the regular curriculum.

Initially an elaborate screening and testing program was used to select and catagorize the children. An evaluation of the use and usefulness of such tests indicated they were of no use to the teachers in actual classroom functioning.

THE BACKGROUND

Phase I Sept. 1966 - Jan. 1967 Review of research and relevant literature of Junior high programs.

Phase II Jan. 1967 - June 1967 Pilot program with 30 7th graders and 2 teachers

Phase III June 1967 - June 1968 Replication of pilot program

Phase IV June 1968 - Sept. 1968 Summer workshop for 10 teachers to learn to set up the program

Phase V Sept. 1968 - Sept. 1969 Program established in 5 schools, 3 in St. Louis County, Mo. and 2 in Nashville, Tennessee

A research team's analysis of the program activities to date indicate the following:

THE CHILDREN

1. Experienced obvious changes in attitudes characterized by their

freedom of expression, comments and lack of "fear" of their teachers

2. Seemed to enjoy school, classroom atmosphere, and even their school work
3. Developed and improved their social skills (especially in relation to one another and to the teachers)
4. Seemed to understand that how much they learned or how far they progressed depended on their own efforts
5. Seemed to work "harder" than they had in the regular school program
6. Gained more than a full school year's academic progress.

THE TEACHERS

1. Were able to assimilate the role of resource person and were able to individualize instruction to a large extent.

THE TECHNIQUES

1. Intrinsic motivation produced good results. No grades, progress reports, or other standard school-rewards were given.
2. Tutoring appears to be beneficial for learning in a majority of the children.
3. The self-contained classroom with opportunities for frequent changes of activities is an important component of the program.
4. Personal attention by the teacher produces "positive" relationships with students.